

F-35-Deal

First, they lied to everyone, then they were rewarded with directors' posts

The US bomber deal is raising more and more questions

by Urs P. Gasche*



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(Picture infosperber)

When senior civil servants set their sights on lucrative posts in the private sector, they make sure to ingratiate themselves with the company in question.

A prime example is **Darko Savic**. Until recently, he was "Mr Fighter Jet" at the *Federal Department of*

Defence (DDPS). There, he was project manager for the F-35 procurement programme.

Savic had negotiated with the US, knew all the details of the purchase agreement and was one of the signatories. Nevertheless, he lied to his superiors in two ways: thanks to the false claim of a cost of "no more than 6 billion Swiss francs"¹ – a figure also propagated by Federal Councillor **Viola Amherd** – the Swiss electorate had approved the procurement of fighter jets by a razor-thin majority of 50.1 per cent of the vote.

1. The purchase price was said to be fixed.
2. There was a multi-year contract for operating costs running until 2040. If maintenance proved more expensive than agreed, the US would have to foot the bill.

Strictly speaking, the referendum should be repeated.

Pilatus AG and Savic are the winners

Those rubbing their hands with glee are *Pilatus Flugzeugwerke AG*. This is because the factory in Stans stands to benefit from lucrative offset

deals.² F-35 manufacturer *Lockheed Martin* has committed to offsetting 60 per cent of the contract value – equivalent to around three billion dollars – through contracts and collaborations with Swiss firms. At least 20 per cent of this must be directly related to the F-35 procurement.

In April 2025, *Armasuisse* announced that an offset project between Pilatus and Lockheed Martin had been approved: Pilatus will gain access to F-35A technology from Lockheed Martin,³ in order to jointly develop a state-of-the-art, next-generation pilot training system – based on its own PC-21 training aircraft.

Thanks to this expertise, Pilatus should in future be able to offer tailor-made training solutions to its own customers – namely air forces worldwide that operate the F-35 or other fifth-generation fighter jets.⁴ This creates new sales opportunities for Pilatus's PC-21 platform.

Darko Savic appointed to a directorship

The man who orchestrated the F-35 deal and lied to the Federal Council and the public in order to seal the deal with a successful referendum – this is the man whom Pilatus Aircraft has rewarded with a lucrative directorship. He is now "Director of Programme Management, Business Aviation" at *Pilatus Aircraft Ltd*. Savic left the DDPS at the end of April 2025 and took up his post at Pilatus on 1 June 2025.

Parliament has never wanted to hear of a longer cooling-off period for senior civil servants. They are still permitted to take up a post immediately with a company that they were previously responsible for supervising or regulating.

Several countries prevent this serious type of conflict of interest. France has set the cooling-off period for senior politicians and high-ranking civil servants moving into the private sector (known as "Pantouflage", or the "revolving door effect" in English) at three years after leaving office.⁵ This regulation is monitored and enforced by an inde-

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pendent constitutional authority, *la Haute Autorité pour la transparence de la vie publique*.⁶

Source: <https://www.infosperber.ch/politik/f-35-zuerst-alle-angelogen-dann-mit-direktorenposten-belohnt/>, 14 September 2026

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¹ This is where "the fixed-price fallacy" ("die Unwahrheit mit dem Fixpreis") first appeared. In the referendum proposal referred to "a maximum of 6 billion Swiss francs". Meanwhile, the 36 F-35-fighter jets are said to cost 7,7 billion. If only 30 are purchased, the cost would be 6.4 billion.

² <https://www.vbs.admin.ch/en/newsb/gZUMF2YH2Hq4MCiG-TSec>

³ <https://www.ar.admin.ch/de/nsb?id=104743>

⁴ <https://skynews.ch/startseiten-news/pilatus-bekommt-f-35-know-how-fuer-kuenftige-trainer/>

⁵ <https://publicmatters.nl/en/actueel/over-draaideuren-pantouflage-franse-regels-voor-lobbytransparantie/>

⁶ <https://www.hatvp.fr/en/>